



## Dorset: Working together to build a better IAS Service

Dorset SENDIASS serves a largely rural County with several large towns. As a result of Local Government Re-organisation (LGR), from 1.4.19 the area of Christchurch became part of a new Council with nearby neighbours Bournemouth and Poole and Dorset County Council became Dorset Council.

Dorset SENDIASS has two permanent full-time officers. They have maintained a parent-carer IAS offer, since being established in April 2000, which is highly regarded by its service users.

The Independent Support funding, following the SEND Reforms in 2014 allowed the service to recruit an additional post intended to develop the work with YP. This officer led on a small-scale consultation with YP about the nature of the information, advice and support they needed. The post allowed the service to begin to extend its remit as required by the new legislation, through an offer to a wider age range and across Education, Health and Social Care. All staff attended relevant training and developed stronger links with professionals working in Health and Social Care.

### The challenge

The Dorset IAS Service is a small service that covers a wide geographical area, several towns and some areas of significant deprivation, including rural deprivation and isolation. Hard work has ensured the telephone support and drop-in services are accessible, however, it is recognised that face-to-face service is not as accessible to some families living without transport in isolated locations. The third post is a temporary post due to being supported by grant funding. Fixed term-posts create issues with retention and the current post holder is the second in 4 years.

There has been a significant increase in demand for the service year-on-year, with the academic years 2016/17 to 2017/18 showing a 24% increase in cases. The nature of the work has shifted with more Tribunal and formal complaints. The impact being that the CYP service offer has not developed as quickly as anticipated.

### Initial impact of IAS programme funding

The opportunity to carry out a thorough service review brought together key partners, some of whom had not previously engaged with the IAS Service. Intensive work with the SEND Commissioner and being able to draw on his network of contacts and expertise has proved beneficial as has linking more effectively with key individuals in Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Social Care Transitions Team, the Health Commissioner and the Designated Clinical Officer. These are individuals who will either become part of the project group themselves or will identify their representative instead. They have contributed and signed up to the Operational Plan. The process has allowed the profile of the service to be raised across the broader organisation as well as providing feedback to the service regarding the perceptions of the IAS Service role. The visit and presentation by Daisy Russell (Policy and Practice Manager at the Council for Disabled Children) to this key group in the early stages of the project, at the point when the self-review was presented, was instrumental in highlighting the requirements and opportunities it provides.

## Impact to service beneficiaries

The Participation & Co-production Strategy Manager is part of the Steering Group. Developing the Operational Plan and the associated funding, allowed an opportunity to work together with the Parent Carer Forum (also a key part of the Steering Group) with a renewed optimism about planning a model of co-production demonstrating best practice. This has raised the service profile positively within the LA. It has provided an opportunity to go outside the LA and begin to explore the engagement of other partners who it is hoped will be involved in the delivery of the Operational Plan.

## Lessons learnt

Overall, the initial phase of the Information Advice and Support (IAS) programme has allowed conversations with senior officers in the LA and Health and drawn their attention to the Minimum Standards and expectations of the modern IAS Service.

The Steering Group has a renewed sense of purpose and relevance which has led to an improved understanding of the need to reconsider their role, structure and engagement including how they can most effectively and authentically contribute to the re-configuration of the IAS Service.

A clearer understanding of the support that can be provided by working closely with the SEND Commissioner and the Participation and Co-production Strategy Manager has been established in terms of delivering the project and maintaining profile within the broader organisation.

There is recognition of the significance of co-production with service-users and key stakeholders and the depth of engagement it could be possible to achieve given the right support, attitudes and willingness to take the risk of genuinely asking about the needs and priorities of service users in authentic conversations with mixed groups of stakeholders.

It is also important to take into account the needs of the IAS Service staff who, throughout the initial review and planning, have continued to deliver the service in its existing format.

## How is the approach being sustained?

The 2 year service operational plan has been signed off by senior officers within the LA, includes the establishment of proper planning, monitoring and reporting arrangements to the joint commissioners of the IAS Service in the future. A Steering Group will be developed in terms of understanding impact, monitoring and driving forward the Minimum Standards and consultation with and involvement of service-users. The local Parent-Carer Forum continues to offer support and challenge and will remain a key part of the Steering Group. Alongside this effective relationships with SEND Commissioners within the LA have also been established and will be sustained.

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